

The limited Role of Electoral Game Rules: the Austrian Party System in “Post-Rokkanian” Settings

Hloušek, Vít

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Hloušek, V. (2006). The limited Role of Electoral Game Rules: the Austrian Party System in “Post-Rokkanian” Settings. *Politics in Central Europe*, 2(1), 24-40. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-64399>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

The limited Role of Electoral Game Rules: the Austrian Party System in “Post-Rokkanian” Settings*

Vít Hloušek

Abstract: *The article deals with the potential impact of the electoral system on the party system. The general discussion, based on Duverger’s and Sartori’s electoral rules, concludes with an assessment of the Austrian case. Austrian party system development is examined with regard to the evolution of the country’s proportional representation electoral system. The author tries to find more relevant explanations for the changes within the Austrian party system’s logic of functioning other than the electoral system, such as the de-alignment of voters and the changing structure of cleavages. In order to show another factor shaping the Austrian party system arrangement, the author tries to discuss not only recent development since the mid 1980s, but he also evaluates the Austrian First Republic and the period from 1945 to 1986. The article concludes with the argument that Duverger’s and Sartori’s electoral rules could be useful in discussing party system format but they have very little to say when party system mechanics is concerned.*

Keywords: *Austria; electoral system; party system; Duverger’s and Sartori’s electoral rules*

Introduction

Austria was traditionally seen as one of the best examples confirming the classical theory of Stein Rokkan’s cleavages, and a model of the emergence of mass political parties and a competitive pluralist party system. On the other hand, it was rather overlooked by scholars focusing on electoral systems in order to find “laws” that describe and analyse electoral systems’ effects on the format and mechanics of party systems. The reason was obvious. Austria embodied an excellent example of pillarized polity (cf. Lijphart 1969; Lijphart 1977) divided into two main camps (*Lager*)⁵, Social Democratic and Catholic-conservative, which competed with the smaller National-Liberal (or Third) camp, which had a less complex structure. The electoral system was rooted in the principle of proportional representation (PR) and enabled two large parties – the Socialist (Social Democratic since 1991) Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) – to maintain control over “their” electoral bases. The ÖVP represented rural, religious, and employers’ interests more, while the SPÖ was a party defending urban, secular, and employees’ interests (cf. Deschouwer 2002:

* The paper was produced as part of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Education research project *Political Parties and the Interest Representation in Contemporary European Democracies* (Code No. MSM0021622407).

⁵ Austrian historian Lothar Höbelt says that: “Austrian politics were tribal” (Höbelt 2003: 6).

200-207). For a long time Austrian parties were able to encourage a high level of formal political participation (partisan membership) and election turnout (cf. Caramani 2004: 68). As Caramani (2004: 144-146) pointed out, Austria was one of the most nationalized systems in Western Europe, meaning that electoral behaviour measured according to electoral outcomes in different constituencies became more and more homogenous. This situation continued at least until the 1980s, although there were certain signs of a radical change as early as the 1960s.

We can observe the processes of Austria's shift from consociation to a competitive version of democracy from the mid-1980s (cf. Luther 1992; Luther, Müller 1992; Ulram 1990, and Plasser, Ulram 2002)⁶; these processes were symbolically completed by the 1999 election and the subsequent formation of an ideologically coherent and *minimal-winning* coalition of the right and the centre-right. This is connected with the transformation of the traditional Austrian two-party system from the 1940s to the 1970s, first to a temporary version of the two-and-a-half party system at the turn of the 1970s, and then to the format of limited pluralism after 1986, that opened the way to formation of the moderate pluralism type in Sartori's model (cf. Müller 2000: 5-9).

This article attempts to discuss the limited impact of the electoral system on the party system. A theoretical discussion based on Sartori's concept of mutual relations of both the electoral and party systems will be tested using the example of Austria, a specific Central European country with experience of more than 50 years of unbroken democratic development. This example enables us to go beyond analysing only recent developments, and provide an evaluation more focused on development and rooted in history. The author is not disagreeing with Sartori's concept of electoral "laws", but he wants to discuss its relative importance *vis-à-vis* other aspects that form the shape and patterns of party competition and party systems generally.

Duverger's electoral "laws" or Sartori's electoral rules?

A systematic effort to examine relations between electoral and party systems could be traced back at least to the famous "laws" first discussed by Maurice Duverger in 1951. He formulated two hypotheses: 1) PR and a two-ballot majority⁷ system opens the way to multipartism; 2) a plurality rule creating and maintaining a two-party system. Duverger devoted great attention to the tendency of PR to maintain: "virtually without change the party system existing at the time of its adoption" (attributed to Duverger 1986: 71; for theoretical discussion concerning Duverger's "laws" cf. Farrell 2001: 153-174; Shugart 2005: 29-36). Let us discuss briefly these findings in the Austrian context. The "magic" ability to maintain the existing party system could not be easily confirmed if we take the Austrian case into consideration. Austria adopted

⁶ Even though the Austrian public's willingness to accept the competitive/conflict models of politicians' behaviour rather than the consensual approach is at least disputable (Plasser, Ulram 2002: 147-150)

⁷ Duverger later somehow refined the tendency produced by a two-ballot majority, postulating that multipartism resulting from a two-ballot majority will be "tempered" by alliances.

the PR formula in 1919, and this meant at the same time that it took a decisive step towards modern mass politics, crossing over the third threshold of democracy, the threshold of representation (cf. Rokkan 1999: 244-260). Nevertheless, the beginning of the PR period went hand in hand with a complex reconstruction of the Austrian party system, which started after the introduction of male universal suffrage in 1907. To put it clearly, the Christian Socialists succeeded in attempting to become part of the establishment as early as the pre-First World War era (the election of 1907 and 1911 were held according to the first past the post system) thanks to cooperation with the conservative Catholic representation of the aristocracy and officials of the Catholic Church. However, the strongest party measured according to electoral support was the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP). The introduction of the PR formula was the means which opened the way for the Social democrats to play the role of a major opposition party and to transform popular support into parliamentary seats after 1919. On the contrary, many elite parties declined with the introduction of the PR formula. The clearest indication of this is the example of small parties of the “Third Camp” (National-Liberal Camp) that almost lost all importance and that were forced to unify under the label of the Pan-German People's Party (GDVP) in 1919. The electoral system kept its PR form after 1945, but it only allowed the continuing predominance of the two major parties until the late 1960s.

Duverger later examined cases such as Germany or Austria, that showed a clear tendency towards the two-party system in spite of a PR formula (cf. Duverger 1986: 71-76). Unfortunately, Duverger paid more attention to German (and Irish) cases and left the Austrian example almost untouched. He briefly argued that the system of Austrian *Proporz* was the reason why his “law” of PR systems did not work there (Duverger 1986: 73, 75-76). Duverger's argument that a similar two-party system would remain the same under the conditions of the plurality rule is theoretically correct, but it does not answer our basic questions concerning the relation between the electoral system and party system.

In order to defend and improve Duverger's “laws” Sartori formulated more precise conditions in which different kinds of PR work. He put more emphasis on the size of a constituency than on mathematical translation formulas: put simply, the smaller the districts the lower the proportionality (Sartori 1986: 53). He also pointed out that most of the real PR systems are impure, and some of them could even be very non-representative due to the size of constituency, electoral threshold, and/or mathematical translation formula (Sartori 1986: 54). Another important change outlined by Sartori was the consideration of the level of structural consolidation of the entire party system (cf. Sartori 1976; Sartori 1997). Sartori's arguments are important for our case study because Austria is seen as an important example combining two-party mechanics with PR, thus it embodied (until the mid-1980s) exceptions which hindered the formulation of electoral “laws” (Sartori 1986: 57). Sartori concludes the discussion by postulating that pure PR is a “no-effect” system and thus he is theoretically close to Duverger's

comments devoted to the “virtually no change” impact of PR systems. Finally, Sartori formulated four rules (Sartori 1986: 58-59; reprinted in Sartori 2001: 93-94) improving Duverger’s “laws”. Only the fourth one mentions PR systems and it reads:

PR systems also obtain reductive effects – though to a less and less predictable extent – in proportion to their non-proportionality; and particular whenever they apply to small constituencies, establish a threshold of representation, or attribute a premium. Under these conditions PR, too, will eliminate the lesser parties whose electorate is dispersed throughout the constituencies; but even a highly impure PR will not eliminate the small parties that dispose of concentrated above-quota strongholds (Sartori 1986: 59).

This rule cannot be left aside without further discussion concerning its system conditions. Sartori presumed that impure PR formulas could turn a two-party system into a system of moderate pluralism, but only under the condition that politics/public opinion are not highly polarized. Pure, or almost pure PR could lead even to a system of extreme pluralism and thus to the “mechanics” of moderate or polarized pluralism. It is, however, important to judge whether both party as well as electoral systems are weak or strong. Sartori correctly presented Austria until the beginning of the 1980s as an example of a strong party system and weak electoral system, concluding that the party system is blocking the potential multiplication effects of Austrian PR (Sartori 1986: 60-63).

It seems at first sight that Sartori’s rules fit quite well the reality of *Proporz* in Austria as well as the reality of changing patterns of inter-party competition since 1966. We will see that two well-structured major parties (ÖVP and SPÖ) maintained a comfortable parliamentary majority without huge problems. Another clear observation shows that the small but virulent forces of the Third Camp were able to survive as a relevant political minority in Parliament, and their potential to form coalitions was constantly uncertain and changing. Still, two problems remain that should be discussed later: 1) the Austrian party system was a two-party *format* but hardly ever two-party “mechanics”; 2) how could we explain the changes that occurred in Austrian party system after 1986?

Austrian party system changes – in format and in the logic of functioning

If we compare the structure of party competition before 1933 and after 1945, we can observe significant changes from the model of polarized pluralism to moderate pluralism patterns of competition. Polarization was even aggravated by the antagonistic position of both main parties represented in all four of Rokkan’s cleavages before the Second World War. While the Christian Socialist Party (predecessor of the ÖVP) represented the interests of rural areas, landowners, peripheral areas, and the Catholic

Church, the Social Democratic Workers’ Party (predecessor of the SPÖ) was strictly secular, protected the interests of urban industrial workers, and held its position firmly in “Red Vienna” and several other industrial centres, while its support in the country was marginal. The cleavages were thus not weakened by their crossing, but on the contrary, they reinforced each other. All the relevant parties operated within this environment of strong competition (cf. Jelavich 2003: 151-191; Rumpler 1990).

The experiences of failed pre-war democracy led Austrian political leaders to more convergent behaviour after 1945. The specific mechanism of cooperation between two strongest camps (*Lager*) was created thanks to the willingness of the Austrian People’s Party and Socialist Party of Austria to cooperate. This arrangement is called Proportional Democracy (*Proporzdemokratie*)⁸ (cf. Engelmann 1962; Mommsen-Reindl 1976: 27-101; Plasser, Ulram, Grausgruber 1992:16-19; Secher 1958:794-798).

Both parties of the large coalition had a relatively similar and in the European context high and stable electoral support (cf. Bartolini 2000: 109-121). The significant electoral failure of the SPÖ in 1949 (38.7 per cent compared to 44.6 per cent in 1945) is explained mainly by the entry of the League of Independents (Freedom Party of Austria since 1956) to the electoral market (Gerlich 1987: 76). The year 1953 however saw a return to “normality” since the SPÖ won the election with 42.1 per cent. The electoral results of both main parties were basically equal (slightly better for the ÖVP) in the 1950s and 1960s, fluctuating above 40 per cent. The main reason for such electoral stability was that the structure of society remained almost untouched (cf. Table 1).

Table 1: Changes in Sector Employment in Austria 1910-1980

Data in %	1910	1934	1951	1961	1969	1977	1980
Primary sector	39.4	37.1	32.6	23.0	19.1	11.8	10.0
Secondary sector	31.1	32.2	37.8	41.5	40.8	41.0	46.6
Tertiary sector	29.5	30.7	29.6	35.5	40.1	47.2	42.4

Source: Bodzenta (1980: 164).

⁸ We can briefly describe the principle of the *Proporzdemokratie* in terms of the slow but firm translation of the mechanism of proportional representation of both large parties from the level of functioning coalition governments, to lower levels of political (and non-political as well) life. The roots of this principle could be traced back to the first coalition government after 1945. Key decisions were made by agreements provided in the cooperation of both parties’ administrations after Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ) left the government in 1947 (The Austrian Communists have not been significant in parliament since 1959). Administrative functions were distributed according to the principle of balance between these two parties at regional and municipal levels. This, of course, made membership in one of the two decisive parties more attractive, at least since the mid-1950s, when even functions in the governing bodies of state-owned or controlled enterprises (airlines, banking sector) started to be distributed according to the *Proporz* principle. Moreover, public administration offices, elementary school head teacher posts etc were distributed according to the same principle.

The Austrian party system thus became relatively stable at the end of the 1940s and remained this way until the 1960s. If we, however, consider the number of relevant parties and the distribution of their support, we can talk about an even longer continuity. When observing the strength of the parties and their potential to form coalitions or be in opposition, we can see that the Austrian party system in fact oscillated around a two-party system until 1983 (cf. Gerlich 1987: 64-66). The SPÖ represented one of the two main poles in this system. However, although the ÖVP was the more active and stronger party until the mid-1960s, i.e. until the period identical with the classical era of the Austrian consociation mechanism, the SPÖ took the initiative from the end of the 1960s, and its one-party governments actually partly changed the mechanisms of Austrian politics. New phenomena, such as increasing voter volatility, emerged.

Table 2: Constant voters and volatile voters in parliamentary election, 1983-2002

	1979- 1983	1983- 1986	1986- 1990	1990- 1994	1994- 1995	1995- 1999	1999- 2002
Voters who changed party preference	7	13	14	16	12	14	20
New mobilized voters, not voted before	3	1	2	6	7	1	7
Demobilized voters who became abstainers	2	3	7	10	3	8	4
Sum of volatile voters	12	17	23	31	22	24	30
Stable non-participators at the election	6	7	9	14	16	17	18
Stable party supporters	82	76	68	55	62	59	53
Sum of stable voters	88	83	77	69	78	76	71
Sum of eligible voters	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Ogris et al (2002: 6)

There were certain shifts from the strictly consociation behaviour of both of the large Austrian political parties towards more competitive models of political behaviour in the 1970s. In spite of this, the ÖVP in this decade was still a very loyal opposition in the European context, which was due to the persistence of consociation periods in other spheres of political and social life (see for instance the mechanisms of social dialogue). During the first half of the 1980s, however, the adversarial behaviour of both large parties towards each other increased (cf. Gerlich 1987: 67-69). The reason was not only the establishment of new parties (the Green Party), but also shifts in the Austrian electorate that will be considered below.

The situation after the 1983 election showed new and until then unexpected problems of the Austrian party system: not only did new possibilities of forming government coalitions occur (SPÖ-FPÖ; SPÖ-ÖVP; ÖVP-FPÖ), but they were actually discussed. The winning combination from these negotiations was a government of the SPÖ and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). The SPÖ initiated talks with the ÖVP to

demonstrate its willingness to govern consensually; the ÖVP-FPÖ talks were held *de facto* for the two parties to improve their bargaining positions *vis-à-vis* the Socialists (Müller 2003: 97).

Using the terms of Stein Rokkan and S. M. Lipset, the Austrian party system finally loosened in the 1986 election (Lipset, Rokkan 1967: 50-56; cf. Bartolini, Mair 2000: 55-67) and the conditions for this slackening had existed since the end of the 1970s.⁹ The Austrian party system changed dramatically, and new political parties emerged (The Green Party; cf. Dachs 1997); traditional “catch-all” parties of the large coalition lost their support; on the contrary, the FPÖ protest party attracted new voters. The powerful internal dynamics within the Austrian party system has been proved by the FPÖ and the Greens to a smaller degree or the Liberal Forum temporarily (1995-99). On the other side, the SPÖ and the ÖVP have been on the defensive during the whole period. Both the two-party system as well as the two-and-half party system patterns disappeared, and too much space remained for discussion of whether expansion of new parties (and thus emergence of a limited pluralism format) will be followed by change towards moderate or polarized pluralism.

Recent developments have left only a few clues to solve the issue of the search for new patterns of Austrian party system dynamics. We can observe the processes of fragmentation of ex-Third-Camp parties. After the remarkable rise of popular support for Jörg Haider’s FPÖ from the beginning of the 1990s, which culminated in an impressive electoral outcome in 1999, enabling the FPÖ to enter a coalition government with the ÖVP, the process of a swift and sharp decline of the FPÖ can be seen, starting with the combination of external crisis (lack of means of mobilization after entering government) and internal disputes leading to Haider’s new project, the “orange” Union for the Austrian Future (BZÖ), which tried to attract protest voters left after the 2000 and 2002 election and who were under-represented by Schüssel’s coalitions (cf. Höbelt 2003). The emergence and decline of the Liberal Forum in the 1990s (cf. Liegl 1997) is more of a historical phenomenon now, but it should be remembered that for several years the Austrian party system retained a five-party format.

Another problem that has to be solved is the question of stabilization of inter-party relations, and both patterns of competition and cooperation. Schüssel’s coalition formula will hardly survive the next election, and there is no clear wisdom that says who and with whom will form the coalition after this year’s election. The coalition potential of the FPÖ declined rapidly, while the Greens also showed a remarkable increase in their fortunes. The main cards will, however, stay in the hands of two major parties, but the possibility of a quick and trouble-free rush back to a large coalition model is more illusion than a probable outcome of the post-election negotiations. I do not rule

⁹ These election were crucial even from the point of view of the total change in voter behaviour trends. While in 1979 the total volatility was only 1.3 per cent (which complied with the standard from the beginning of the 50s), it was 6.1 per cent in 1986, and 9.9 per cent in 1990 (Plasser, Ulram, Grausgruber 1992: 30).

out the possibility of a large coalition, but the way towards this solution would be very complicated. The Austrian party system underwent important steps towards the system of moderate pluralism in 1986, but we still have to wait for more predictable coalition/opposition formulas enabling us to judge the type of party system more precisely.

But let us go back to Austrian large catch-all parties – the ÖVP and SPÖ. Both of the traditional large parties had to cope with the haemorrhage of the traditional voters and have been forced to face appeals for redefinition of some of their ideological and programme basis. (Kitschelt 1994; for general discussion devoted to decline of *catch-all* mechanisms cf. Puhle 2002). Both parties, however, have a better position compared to the mid-1990s. The reform of the economic policy of the FPÖ, connected with implementation of tax reform limiting the generous Austrian welfare state, brought workers back to the fold of the Social Democrats. The evaluation of the ÖVP governmental performance is also favourable, and the Chairman, Wolfgang Schüssel, is seen as a trustworthy and competent politician and compared to Gusenbauer, the SPÖ chairman, seems to be in many aspects a charismatic person. These parties thus remained the main axis of the Austrian party system in the 2002 election and will decide (probably not in mutual agreement) about the form of a government coalition.

The Austrian electoral system – more a sign of continuity than an example of a fluid system

The genesis of the Austrian electoral system started at the beginning of the 1860s. More than four decades had passed until limited suffrage became universal for men, introduced in 1905-07. The single member plurality electoral system remained however with the situation changing dramatically after the decline of the Habsburg Empire after the First World War. The Austrian First Republic adopted a PR electoral system which helped to maintain social segmentation and to translate it into the composition of Parliament. The PR principle is enshrined in the Austrian constitution (Article 26) and its use in practice has remained relatively consistent since 1945. Nevertheless, there were several changes to the Austrian electoral system. Important reforms occurred in 1971 and 1992, but it could be said that the Austrian electoral system created and creates only small or even negligible distortions (Müller 2003: 91; Müller 2005: 397). The proposal to introduce a personalized PR system as in Germany was rejected due to the unwillingness of both the ÖVP and SPÖ to apply it. The idea of switching to a simple majority vote system met the same fate (Müller 2005: 412-414; Pelinka 1999: 504).

The 1971 reform was provoked by the feeling in politics that electoral law favoured ÖVP voters and it was consequently disadvantageous for both the SPÖ and FPÖ due to the arrangement of electoral districts. The former 25 districts were replaced by nine

new and larger units. The new system was, however, criticized for not allowing personal contact between candidates and voters and for giving all power to political parties in the process of distribution of candidates on the electoral list. Discussions held in the 1970s and 1980s lead to the latest reform in 1992. Forty smaller districts, with around 180,000 eligible voters, were created in order to enable personal contact between candidates and voters. Preferential voting within a party list system was introduced too (cf. Fischer 1997: 101-102; Müller 2005: 399-400).

The Austrian Parliament – National Assembly (*Nationalrat*) – is composed of 183 members, and Austria is divided into 43 electoral districts. Candidates are nominated via party lists. Voters could change the ordering of candidate using preferential voting at district and regional levels. There is a per cent threshold at state level, which qualifies parties eligible for the distribution of seats in Parliament. Nevertheless, there is another possibility for the party to take part in national level seat distribution if the party wins a seat in the first tier in any of the 43 districts. The threshold is combined with three-tier districts at electoral unit, regional, and national levels using the Hare method (for the first and the second tiers) and d’Hondt method (for the third tier) systems (cf. Müller 2005: 401-405).

How pure is the Austrian PR system? The format of Austrian PR awards seats in such a way that the outcome is *de facto* proportional in terms of the total number of votes (cf. Gallagher, Mitchell 2005: 17). The Austrian electoral system ranks among the most proportional systems according to Farrell (2001: 157-159; cf. Müller 2005: 407-408): the Gallagher index of disproportion was only 1.8 (the mean for the 1994-2002 period compared with 3.38 in Germany or 5.20 in the Czech Republic) at the end of the 1990s; the effective number of parties index was 3.54 at the same time, which corresponds more or less with the four main parties represented in Parliament.

Searching for an alternative explanation: changes in society and political behaviour; restructuring cleavages of Austrian politics

The break-up of the camp *milieu* that started in the 1970s brought about the individualization of voter behaviour, a rapid increase in the degree of voter volatility (cf. Plasser, Ulram 2000; Müller 2000: 9-13; Müller, Plasser, Ulram 2004; Plasser, Ulram 2002), a decrease in the effectiveness of traditional socio-political networks built around both large parties; and the phenomenon of disgust with politics increased (*Politikverdrossenheit*; cf. Ulram 1990: 170-180, 215-220; Pelinka, Rosenberger 174-176; Müller, Plasser, Ulram 2004: 149-154; Plasser, Ulram 2002: 108-115). All these processes also introduced a new dynamic in Austrian party competition. Both large parties had to adapt from camp-oriented parties to “catch-all” forms of parties focused primarily on electoral competition. However, the party membership of the SPÖ and ÖVP remains relatively high in the Western European context (cf. Pelinka, Rosenberger 2003: 152-153).

Table 3: Development in the number of members of SPÖ, ÖVP and FPÖ

SPÖ		ÖVP (estimate)		FPÖ	
1970	719,389	1974	539,000	1970	32,800
1975	693,156	1977	546,000	1975	33,000
1980	719,881	1980	554,000	1980	37,380
1985	685,588	1986	555,000	1985	37,057
1990	597,426	1990	555,000	1990	40,629

Source: Nick, Pelinka (1993: 73)

Until the 1980s the electoral behaviour of Austrian society had been very stable, determined by a camp mentality and still characterized by electoral models from the time of a fully stratified society.¹⁰ The most turbulent period was the second half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, when Austrian electoral behaviour was dominated by processes of segmentation, individualization and de-alignment of socio-political relations (cf. Plasser 1988; Plasser, Ulram, Grausgruber 1992: 20-23; Plasser, Ulram 2002: 83-100) that increased electoral mobility in an unprecedented manner (Ulram 1990: 288-289). While in 1970 the percentage of voters that strongly identified themselves with their party and were its core members constituted 65 per cent of all voters, this was only 39 per cent in 1986, and only 28 per cent in 1995 (Pelinka, Rosenberger 2003: 177). This de-segmentation was mainly of benefit to those parties that were not so connected with the traditional environment of strong mass political groupings (FPÖ and Greens). The SPÖ's fall was partly caused by the change in the role of trade unions in the economy, while the ÖVP suffered mainly through the process of secularization in among Austrian voters. Both parties, moreover, were not very attractive to the new post-material oriented section of the electorate, in particular the younger generation. On the other hand, older people still vote mainly for the ÖVP and the SPÖ. However, the process of breaking identification relations of voter-party slowed down considerably at the beginning of the current decade, and some authors (Plasser, Ulram 2002: 92) talk about a certain re-stabilization.

Table 4: Aggregated differences in the electoral behaviour of age cohorts 1986-99

Superiority (+) or fall (-) of the SPÖ and the ÖVP compared to the FPÖ with the LIF and the Greens

Age cohort	1986	1990	1994	1995	1999	SPÖ and ÖVP 1986-1999
18-29	+44	+18	±0	-4	-10	-54
30-44	+60	+44	+14	+22	+14	-46
15-59	+80	+60	+34	+44	+37	-43
60 and above	+78	+80	+48	+56	+47	-31

Source: Müller (2000: 21).

¹⁰ Among the Western European countries, Austria was a state with the lowest average total volatility in the period from 1918 to 1985 (Bartolini, Mair 1990: 74, and 323-324).

Besides the break-up of the camp mentality, the Austrian electoral market was also liberalized by the process of privatization of many state enterprises in the 1980s and reduction of the welfare state, which began in the 1990s and progressed during Schüssel's first coalition government of the ÖVP and FPÖ in 2000-02 (Pelinka, Rosenberger 2003: 62-63). Furthermore, new issues emerged that the voters cared about.¹¹ Another example of declining of traditional means of *Lager* control over the electorate was the breakdown of traditional partisan dailies (as for example SPÖ-based *Arbeiter Zeitung*) and at the same time the emergence of new printed media such as *Der Standard* at the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s. More competition in the sphere of electronic media (broadcasting) has opened since then as well (Larkey 1999: 213-215).

Neither of the two large Austrian parties was prepared for these changes at the end of the 1980s. According to Peter Ulram, the following was still true at the beginning of the 1990s:

1. The party structures were not able to react to the desegmentation and decline in camp mentality and failed to open communication for representing the demands of new voters and voter group;
2. the party decision processes handled new issues only with great difficulty, the political style of both large parties was to a considerable degree uncoordinated, unsystematic, aggressive, and full of traditional resentments,
3. a large group of the members of both parties at the high and medium level still lived in the mental environment of the traditional conception of politics, which differentiated them not only from the population but also for instance from the economic and cultural élite, which lead to a rapid decline in the ability of the “political class” to mobilize voters (Ulram 1990: 289-290).

Besides the behaviour of Austrian citizens, we can find another reason for the re-structuring of Austrian party system's patterns of functioning. We have already observed the remarkable rigidity of cleavages which have had loosened in the years just after the Second World War and the mid-1960s. The cleavages structure has loosened since the end of the 1960s and, moreover, they started to be less society-based and became more political (for this distinction cf. Römmele 1999¹²). What does the cleavage structure in Austria look like today?

¹¹ According to Wolfgang C. Müller, such issues were unemployment, the shock from the slump in some sectors of Austrian economy after joining the EU, environmental problems, and immigration (Müller 2000: 22-23; cf. Plasser, Ulram 2002: 151-163).

¹² A similar, although not the same, distinction was suggested by Mattei Dogan (2002), who distinguished vertical cleavages dividing society according to cultural criteria, and horizontal cleavages that divide society according to socio-economic stratification. He attempted to devise a matrix of West European countries according to relative strength of both horizontal and vertical cleavages, suggesting that Austria is, together with Germany and Belgium, an example of country with strong vertical cleavages and strong horizontal cleavages also (Dogan 2002: 98). Dogan's concept should be, however, more precise in the definition of the relationship between vertical and horizontal cleavages on the one hand and the traditional Rokkan's functional and territorial dimension on the other hand because it seems that his model of vertical cleavages combines both of these dimensions in a certain but unfortunately unclear way.

A certain role is still played by the traditional cleavage between owners and workers, which was somewhat transformed into a looser socio-economic cleavage dividing right and left, to a smaller degree between church and state, to an even smaller degree than between city and the country, while the traditional Austrian character of the cleavage between centre and periphery that came about in relation to Germany's loss of its former strength. Austrian society is currently characterized by relatively strong post material issues and the related post-material cleavages, both in the movement towards environmental models, which played into the hands of the Greens (entered Parliament in 1986), and in the sense of supporting the "new" politics ("new" right and "new", in Austria mainly the socially liberal, "left"), which was of benefit in the second half of the 1990s mainly to the FPÖ and (temporarily) the Liberal Forum (cf. Ulram 1990: 81-87; Müller 2000: 41-43; Plasser, Ulram 2002: 163-169). We can currently talk about the partial unlocking of social relations determined by cleavages and the transformation of Rokkan-type cleavages into less strict political divides (see Table 5). The socio-economic cleavage dominates (cf. Hloušek, Kopeček 2005: 4-5) combining economic and societal issues. It is cut across by an Inglehart-like post-material cleavage which combines axiological and environmental factors.

Table 5: Structure of main cleavages in the current Austrian party system

Post-material cleavage	Socio-economic cleavage	
	<i>material oriented</i>	
	Left	Right
	<i>Post-material oriented</i>	
	<div> <div>KPÖ</div> <div>SPÖ</div> <div>Greens</div> </div>	<div> <div>ÖVP</div> <div>FPÖ</div> <div>BZÖ</div> <div>LIF</div> </div>

Conclusion – limited impact of electoral rules on a party system's logic of functioning in "Post-Rokkanian" world

The Austrian electoral system belongs to those which are "feeble" according to Sartori, and its relevance for party system formation is thus limited. The only real consequence of the 1992 electoral system was the failure of the Liberal Forum to enter Parliament in 1999. This small centrist party, which seceded from the FPÖ in 1993, would have entered Parliament according to the 1971 system. A certain psychological effect of the 4 per cent threshold worked also though the negotiation of two former Green List members, which led to the reinforcement of the Green Party by the members of a concurrence "environmental" project in 1993 (Müller 2005: 406-407).

The Austrian case shows that more appropriate than electoral "laws" or rules is a healthy scepticism related to the ability of electoral rules to decisively shape the logic of party systems. We could agree with German political scientist Dieter Nohlen

(Nohlen 1990: 272-279), who criticized Duverger’s and Sartori’s concepts for certain empirical, theoretical, and methodological reasons and who pointed out the limited explanatory capacity of both “laws” and rules. The problem with Sartori’s electoral rules is that they could be related successfully only to the format of a party system. Regrettably, they have only little to say when we need to discuss impacts on the mechanics of party systems.

If we apply Sartori’s fourth rule to the Austrian party system we can conclude that relatively pure Austrian PR has only a slight reductive effect on the Austrian party system format. The only “victim” of the Austrian electoral system is Liberal Forum, which declined in 1999 when it only narrowly fell below the nationwide electoral threshold. It is, of course, disputable whether the electoral system caused the decline of the Liberals. It seems to be more plausible explanation that the effects of Austrian PR only fostered tendencies provoked by other stimuli. Put another way, Austrian PR enabled newly emerging (or newly reinforcing) parties – the Greens and the FPÖ – to enter Parliament relatively quickly, thus allowing the expansion of the Austrian party system format from two (and-a-half) parties to three and four (potentially even five) parties.

But how can we explain the changes in a party system’s logic of functioning? Sartori is able to answer clearly because he presupposes the almost causal relation between a format and a type. A four (or five) party format – limited pluralism – thus leads almost inevitably to the type of moderate pluralism (cf. Sartori 1976: 119-130, 282-293). But the answer is not so clear in the Austrian case. The Austrian party system responded somehow belatedly to changes in Austrian society. The decline of traditional cleavages and the camp mentality, the emergence and reinforcement of new cleavages and other related processes such as “medialisation” of Austrian politics created a less stable environment. Political parties have to find new ways of attracting more fragmented and more fluid groups of voters in the “Post-Rokkanian” world characterized by the existence of cartel-like parties operating in an environment of only weak alignments. The analysis of the electoral system is thus only one and a relatively small part of inquiry into the nature and behaviour of political parties in a party system. The Austrian case could be used as a fine example supporting such a conclusion.

References

- Bartolini, Stefano (2000): *The Political Mobilization of the European Left, 1860-1980: The Class Cleavage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bartolini, Stefano; Mair, Peter (1990): *Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability: The Stabilization of European Electorates, 1885-1895*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bodzenta, Erich (1980): Änderungen der österreichischen Sozialstruktur in der Ersten und Zweiten Republik, in: Zöllner, Erich (ed.): *Österreichs Sozialstrukturen in historischer Sicht*, Wien: Bundesverlag, 155-172.

- Caramani, Danielle (2004): *The Nationalization of Politics: The Formation of National Electorates and Party Systems in Western Europe*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dachs, Herbert (1997): Grünalternative Parteien, in: Dachs, Herbert; Gerlich, Peter; Gottweis, Herbert; Horner, Franz; Kramer, Helmut; Lauber, Volkmar; Müller, Wolfgang C.; Tálos, Emmerich (eds.): *Handbuch des politischen Systems Österreichs*, Wien: Manzsche Verlag, 304-314.
- Deschouwer, Kris (2002): Freezing pillars and frozen cleavages: Party systems and voter alignments in the consociational democracies, in: Karvonen, Lauri; Kuhnle, Stein (eds.): *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited*, London and New York: Routledge, 199-215.
- Dogan, Mattei (2002): Class, religion, party: Triple decline of electoral cleavages in Western Europe, in: Karvonen, Lauri; Kuhnle, Stein (eds.): *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited*, London and New York: Routledge, 93-114.
- Duverger, Maurice (1986): Duverger's Law: Forty Years Later, in: Grofman, Bernard; Lijphart, Arend (eds.): *Electoral Laws and their Political Consequences*, New York: Agathon Press, 69-84.
- Engelmann, Frederick C. (1962): Haggling for the Equilibrium: The Renegotiation of the Austrian Coalition, 1959, *The American Political Science Review* 56(3), 651-662.
- Farrell, David M. (2001): *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Fischer, Heinz (1997): Das Parlament, in: Dachs, Herbert; Gerlich, Peter; Gottweis, Herbert; Horner, Franz; Kramer, Helmut; Lauber, Volkmar; Müller, Wolfgang C.; Tálos, Emmerich (eds.): *Handbuch des politischen Systems Österreichs*, Wien: Manzsche Verlag, 99-121.
- Gallagher, Michael; Mitchell, Paul (2005): Introduction to Electoral Systems, in: Gallagher, Michael; Mitchell, Paul (eds.): *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 3-23.
- Gerlich, Peter (1987): Consociationalism to Competition: The Austrian Party System since 1945, in: Daalder, Hans (ed.): *Party Systems in Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Belgium*, London: Frances Pinter, 61-106.
- Hloušek, Vít; Kopeček, Lubomír (2005): *Cleavages in Contemporary Czech and Slovak Politics between Persistence and Change*, Paper prepared for the ECPR Conference - Budapest, 8-10 September 2005, Panel 30-10: Parties, Party Systems and Cleavages in CEE II <http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/generalconference/budapest/papers/30/10/Hlousek.pdf>, 30 January 2006.
- Höbelt, Lothar (2003): *Defiant Populist: Jörg Haider and the Politics of Austria*, West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.

- Jelavich, Barbara (2003): *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic, 1815-1986*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kitschelt, Herbert (1994): *Austrian and Swedish Social Democrats in Crisis. Party Strategy and Organization in Corporatist Regimes*, Comparative Political Studies 27(1), 3-40.
- Larkey, Edward (1999): Americanization, Cultural Change, and Austrian Identity, in: Good, David. F.; Wodak, Ruth (eds.): *From World War to Waldheim. Culture and Politics in Austria and the United States*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 210-235.
- Liegl, Barbara (1997): Das Liberale Forum, in: Dachs, Herbert; Gerlich, Peter; Gottweis, Herbert; Horner, Franz; Kramer, Helmut; Lauber, Volkmar; Müller, Wolfgang C.; Tálos, Emmerich (eds.): *Handbuch des politischen Systems Österreichs*, Wien: Manzsche Verlag, 315-322.
- Lijphart, Arend (1969): *Consociational Democracy*, World Politics 21(2), 207-225.
- Lijphart, Arend (1977): *Democracy in Plural Societies. A Comparative Exploration*, New Haven – London: Yale University Press.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin; Rokkan, Stein (1967): Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction, in: Lipset, S. M.; Rokkan, S. (eds.): *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspective*, New York: The Free Press and Collier-MacMillan Ltd., 1-64.
- Luther, Kurt Richard (1992): Consociationalism, Parties and the Party System, in: Luther, Kurt Richard; Müller, Wolfgang C. (eds.): *Politics in Austria: Still a Case of Consociationalism?*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 45-98.
- Luther, Kurt Richard; Müller, Wolfgang C. (1992): Consociationalism and the Austrian Political System, in: Luther, Kurt Richard; Müller, Wolfgang C. (eds.): *Politics in Austria: Still a Case of Consociationalism?*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1-15.
- Mommsen-Reindl, Margareta (1976): *Das Österreichische Proporzdemokratie und der Fall Habsburg*, Wien – Köln – Graz: Hermann Böhlau Nachf.
- Müller, Wolfgang C. (2005): Austria: A Complex Electoral System with Subtle Effects, in: Gallagher, Michael; Mitchell, Paul (eds.): *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 397-416.
- Müller, Wolfgang C. (2003): Austria: Tight Coalitions and Stable Government, in: Müller, Wolfgang C.; Strøm, Kaare (eds.): *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 86-125.
- Müller, Wolfgang C. (1997): Das Parteiensystem, in: Dachs, Herbert; Gerlich, Peter; Gottweis, Herbert; Horner, Franz; Kramer, Helmut; Lauber, Volkmar; Müller, Wolfgang C.; Tálos, Emmerich (Hrsg.): *Handbuch des politischen Systems Österreichs. Die Zweite Republik*, Wien: Manzsche Verlag, 215-234.
- Müller, Wolfgang C. (2000): *Election and the Dynamics of the Austrian Party System since 1986*, Wien: Zentrum für Angewandte Politikforschung (<http://www.zapol.at>), 30 January 2006.

- Müller, Wolfgang C.; Plasser, Fritz; Ulram, Peter A. (2004): Party ReSPÖnses to the Erosion of Voter Loyalties in Austria: Weakness as an Advantage and Strength as a Handicap, in: Mair, Peter; Müller, Wolfgang C.; Plasser, Fritz (eds.): *Political Parties and Electoral Change: Party ReSPÖnses to Electoral Markets*, London: SAGE, 145-178.
- Nick, Rainer; Pelinka, Anton (1993): *Österreichs Politische Landschaft*, Innsbruck: Haymon-Verlag.
- Nohlen, Dieter (1990): *Wahlrecht und Parteiensystem*, Opladen: Leske+Budrich.
- Ogris, Günther; Hofinger, Christoph; Picker, Ruth; Ortner, Georg; Thalhammer, Eva (2002): Nationalratswahl 2002. Analyse des Wahlergebnisses und des Wahlkampfes, Wien: SORA (<http://www.sora.at>), 30 January 2006.
- Pelinka, Anton (1999): Das politische system Österreichs, in: Ismayr, Wolfgang (ed.): *Die politischen Systeme Westeuropas*, Opladen: Leske+Budrich, 489-517.
- Pelinka, Anton; Rosenberger, Sieglinde (2003): *Österreichische Politik*. Grundlagen, Strukturen, Trends, Wien: WUV.
- Plasser, Fritz (1988): Das österreichische Parteiensystem zwischen Erosion und Innovation. Eine empirische Langzeitanalyse, in: Pelinka, Anton; Plasser, Fritz (eds.): *Das österreichische Parteiensystem*, Wien – Köln – Graz: Böhlau Verlag, 53-78.
- Plasser, Fritz; Ulram, Peter A. (2002): *Das österreichische Politikverständnis. Von der Konsensus- zur Konfliktkultur?*, Wien: WUV, ZAP, Ludwig Boltzmann Institut.
- Plasser, Fritz; Ulram, Peter A. (2000): *The Changing Austrian Voter*, Wien: Zentrum für Angewandte Politikforschung (<http://www.zapol.at>), 30 January 2006.
- Plasser, Fritz; Ulram, Peter A.; Grausgruber, Alfred (1992): The Decline of 'Lager Mentality' and the New Model of Electoral Competition in Austria, in: Luther, Kurt Richard; Müller, Wolfgang C. (eds.): *Politics in Austria: Still a Case of Consociationalism?*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 16-44.
- Puhle, Hans-Jürgen (2002): Still the Age of Catch-allism? Volksparteien and Parteienstaat in Crisis and Re-equilibration, in: Gunther, Richard; Montero, José Ramón; Linz, Juan J. (eds.): *Political Parties. Old Concepts and New Challenges*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 58-83.
- Rokkan, Stein (1999): *State Formation, Nation-Building, and Mass Politics in Europe: The Theory of Stein Rokkan* (edited by P. Flora, with S. Kuhnle and D. Urwin), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Römmele, Andrea (1999): Cleavage Structures and Party Systems in East and Central Europe, in: Lawson, Kay; Römmele, Andrea; Karasimeonov, Georgi (eds.): *Cleavages, Parties, and Voters: Studies from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania*, Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1-18.
- Rumpler, Helmut (1990): Parlamentarismus und Demokratieverständnis in Österreich 1918-1933, in: Drabek, Anna M.; Plaschka, Richard G.; Rumpler, Helmut (eds.):

Das Parteienwesen Österreichs und Ungarns in der Zwischenkriegszeit, Wien: Verlag der ÖAW, 1-17.

Sartori, Giovanni (1997): *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry to Structures, Incentives, and Outcomes*, New York: New York University Press.

Sartori, Giovanni (1976): *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sartori, Giovanni (1986): The Influence of Electoral Systems: Faulty Laws or Faulty Method?, in: Grofman, Bernard; Lijphart, Arend (eds.): *Electoral Laws and their Political Consequences*, New York: Agathon Press, 43-68.

Sartori, Giovanni (2001): The Party Effects of Electoral Systems, in: Diamond, Larry; Gunther, Richard (eds.): *Political Parties and Democracy*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 90-105.

Secher, Herbert P. (1958): *Coalition Government: The Case of the Second Austrian Republic*, *The American Political Science Review* 52(3), 791-808.

Shugart, Matthew Søberg (2005): Comparative Electoral Systems Research: The Maturation of a Field and New Challenges Ahead, in: Gallagher, Michael; Mitchell, Paul (eds.): *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 25-55.

Ullrich, Peter A. (1990): *Hegemonie und Erosion: Politische Kultur und politischer Wandel in Österreich*, Wien, Köln, Graz: Böhlau Verlag.

Vít Hloušek (1977) works as the Deputy Director of the International Institute of Political Science of Masaryk-University and as Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations and European Studies and Comparative Political Research Institute, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. His main fields of research interests are comparative European politics and processes of modern mass-politics-building in Central and Western European countries. Contact: Mezinárodní politologický ústav Masarykovy Univerzity, Joštova 10, CZ 602 00, Brno, Czech Republic.

E-mail: hlousek@iips.cz.